

# CROP newsletter

Comparative Research Programme On Poverty

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### CHILD POVERTY IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Recent decades have not been kind to children in many parts of the world, writes *Leif Jensen, from the Pennsylvania State University, USA.*

Blanc (1994) reports that compared to 1980, children of today in most African countries and in many developing nations of Asia and Latin America are more likely to be born into poverty, born prematurely, die in the first year of life, be malnourished, have underemployed parents, live in single parent households, be victims of abuse, and drop out of primary school. While less dire, circumstances facing children of the industrialized West and the new democracies of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, also show signs of stress and deterioration. Cornia and Danziger (1997) point to 1973 as the year roughly marking the end of a period of steady improvement for Western youth, and the beginning of an era of decline. In the USA, the UK and elsewhere, poverty rates have generally trended upward in recent decades, rising faster among children than any other age group. An often cited statistic is that one in five USA children are poor. And even in these very rich countries, the implications of rising poverty can be found in unsettling trends in such basic markers as access to medical care and infant mortality. Finally, the well documented economic tempest that has battered Eastern European countries as they transition away from central planning, has likewise tolled hardest on children, if prevailing poverty rates are any indication (Cornia and Danziger, 1997).

These potentially alarming signals only strengthen the reasons why social scientist should be concerned about children's well-being and poverty today. Poor children are innocent victims of poverty, and often suffer undue hardship from policies designed to change their parents' behavior or to improve the economies in which their parents operate. That children are inherently politically weak only compounds their vulnerability to adverse social and market forces. And while demographic transitions are headed toward completion in most parts of the developing world, population momentum ensures there will be ever larger cohorts of youngsters in the decades immediately ahead. With the future in their hands, children will be the ones who shape tomorrow's world, and as a group they need to get off to the best start they can. However, with increasing child poverty in many corners of the world, we seem to be heading in the wrong direction. The time seems right, then, to explore the feasibility of and interest in a CROP initiative on child poverty. Here I sketch such an initiative.

As a point of departure it is tempting to dwell on the causes of child poverty. However, since these necessarily balloon into all the factors that affect the circumstances of parents, households, and socioeconomic contexts, the study of child poverty becomes one and the same as the study of poverty itself. A critical first step, therefore, is to organize our concern around a manageable number of key substantive areas. Just six possibilities follow. (*continues on page 2*)

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*Unintended effects of policy.* As noted, children can be the unwitting victims of policies aimed at their parents or economies. In many developing countries, the reduction in public expenditures that is part of most structural adjustment packages, may have especially detrimental effects on poor children. UNICEF (1997:28) notes that because cuts have come in health, education, food subsidies, and other social services, "the real cost of adjustment is being paid disproportionately by the poor and by their children." Elsewhere, recent welfare reforms in the USA place unprecedented weight on gainful employment as a route out of dependence on public assistance, in part by placing time limits on receipt of welfare benefits. While there is reason to doubt that labor demand will be sufficient to absorb all those who will need work, the reform continues apace. It is unclear what will happen to children in families where parents have neither jobs nor a safety net to rely on. The inadvertent effects of policy changes on poor children could be a binding theme for future research.

*Children's work.* Child labor – hazardous and debilitating work in particular – has attracted international concern in recent years. While child labor is by no means restricted to poor countries, nor to only the poorest sectors across countries, it is intertwined with poverty in important ways. Child workers tend to be from poor families, many remit all their wages to their families, and children's income contribution can be critical for family survival (UNICEF, 1997). Questions that could benefit from comparative research and reflection include, to what extent do employers substitute child for adult labor? Are their important gender differences? What are the implications of child labor for later life attainment among poor children? To what extent does child labor come at the cost of reduced schooling? Are there forms of child labor that increase children's human capital or are otherwise beneficial for poor children?

*Schooling and education.* Regarding the nexus of schooling and child poverty, several research issues emerge. Cuts in social spending in developing countries have been particularly severe in education, giving rise to concerns about access to quality primary education for poor children. At the same time, the movement toward devolution of school systems raises the prospect of increasing spatial disparities in educational quality, with poor places (and their children) losing out. Also, if education is to generate real prospects for upward mobility among

poor children, the rigidity and relevance of prevailing curricula need to be addressed (UNICEF, 1997).

*Poor children and the family.* As the principal social unit in which young children are nurtured, the family has critical implications for the well-being of poor children. Comparative research could address several issues. For example, women and children often are deprived of their fair share of household resources as evidenced by their disproportionate likelihood of being malnourished. One implication is that measured poverty may understate the true prevalence of poverty among children. We need to examine within-family inequality in the distribution of resources. A second issue concerns changing family structure. Many countries – particularly in the industrialized North – have experienced a shift toward single parent families. Strong evidence exists that this shift has played a role in the rise in child poverty there (Cornia and Danziger, 1997). Many other research issues in this area could be identified.

*The doubly jeopardized.* Street children who lack families altogether; children of refugee groups or diasporas; or children of racial, ethnic, caste, or other ascribed groups who suffer prejudice or discrimination within societies, can be said to suffer a double jeopardy. A possible theme for comparative research could be the unique problems and prospects of these especially vulnerable groups.

*Methodological challenges.* Researching child poverty poses special challenges which could themselves be the focus of concern. These span fundamental definitional issues, such as what is childhood, to more technical puzzles such as appropriate equivalence scaling. This theme also includes data needs, such as better and more direct measures of child poverty and its correlates, and longitudinal data to help understand the implications of child poverty for later life outcomes.

Clearly this list could go on. The intent here is merely to spark dialogue on the kinds of issues that might be addressed, in an effort to formulate a set of themes around which interested researchers could coalesce. These issues would preferably be those that would generate viable proposals for external funding, both for conferences and for the research itself.

*References:* Blanc, C. S. *Urban Children in Distress: Global Predicaments and Innovative Strategies.* Yverdon, Switzerland: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers.

Cornia, G. A. and S. Danziger. 1997. *Child Poverty and Deprivation in the Industrialized Countries, 1945-1995.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund). 1997. *The State of the World's Children, 1997.* New York: Oxford University Press.

**If you want to participate in the development of an international, comparative project about child poverty, you may contact:** Professor Leif Jensen, Department of Agriculture Economics and Rural Sociology, The Pennsylvania State University, 110 C Armsby Building, PA: 16802-5600 University Park, USA, fax: +1-814-8653746, email: [lij1@psu.edu](mailto:lij1@psu.edu)

### **CROP SURVEY - BOOK-PRIZES TO BE WON**

Enclosed in this edition of the CROP Newsletter is a questionnaire to update the information about the members' current research activities.

The CROP database consists of more than 1100 entries with information about poverty research projects, institutes and persons. In order to update and expand this database you are asked to fill in the questionnaire and return it to CROP as soon as possible, and no later than May 1st.

Most people are wary of filling out still more questionnaires. In order to make it a little more attractive we will make a drawing among all the returned questionnaires. Among the submissions which reach the CROP Secretariat before May 1st, the following prizes will be drawn: The first prize is a complete set of CROP publications. The second and third prize is a copy of the book *Poverty: A Global Review, Handbook on International Poverty Research.* The following ten prizes is a set of the two books *Law, Power and Poverty* and *Poverty and Participation in Civil Society.*

### **UN CONFERENCE ON POVERTY**

The United Nations has decided to host a high level conference to discuss the plight of the poorest of the world's poor. The conference will take place in 2001, and will be the third in a series of major UN conferences on the world's poorest nations.

## editorial

By now the CROP network has become very large, with more than eleven hundred members in close to one hundred countries. That represents an enormous pool of knowledge. If all this intellectual capital were to be put to optimal use, the cumulated understanding of causes and manifestations of poverty would make a major leap forward.

Ideas for how this pool of knowledge can be organised further to have the impact it deserves, are appreciated and will be welcomed at the Secretariat.

A major part of the current administrative energy in CROP is used to link poverty researchers from different regions and to establish contact between researchers and those in need of knowledge about poverty related issues. But whatever we are doing, it is a far cry from the potential for dissemination of poverty research and the wide need for communication about poverty research which lies ahead.

For the CROP Secretariat to become more efficient it is necessary to know more about the persons who are members of CROPnet. If we are to become better at linking poverty researchers who are working within the same sphere of interest, we need to know more about the current projects our members are working on. If we want to draw on regional expertise for workshops, projects and consultancies, we need to know more about the training and special skills of the members. If we want to develop new activities and to tailor already established activities better to the CROPnet, we need to know more about the expectations, skills and needs in the field of poverty. Or in short, if we want to go beyond an already established network of people participating on many levels of CROPs activities and stretch out to new people, we need where to find them.

The enclosed questionnaire is an attempt to expand the existing database. If successful, it will give CROP a new impetus to networking among its members and to bring forward and integrate expertise from different parts of the world. You are invited to fill out the questionnaire and become part of this development.

*Else Øyen, Chair of CROP*

Our Internet address is  
**www.crop.org**  
please make a visit

## CALL FOR PAPERS

CROP, INSTITUTO TECNOLÓGICO Y DE ESTUDIOS SUPERIORES  
DE MONTERREY AND UNIVERSIDAD IBEROAMERICANA

CONVENE A WORKSHOP ON

## POVERTY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN LATIN AMERICA

MEXICO CITY, MEXICO, MARCH 18 - 20, 1999

CROP will organise a workshop on "Poverty and Social Justice in Latin America" in co-operation with Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey and Universidad Iberoamericana. The workshop will be held in Mexico City. You are cordially invited to offer a paper (in English/or Spanish) for the workshop. A background paper for the conference is available upon request from the CROP Secretariat. Papers presented at the workshop must fall in one of the following categories:

- Analysis of the relation between poverty and social justice, with particular emphasis on Latin American cases
- Developments in human rights and the search for ethical responses to past, present and future distributional dilemmas
- The quest for a public ethic based on peace, justice and human rights

The workshop will be limited to 25 participants and preference will be given to scholars from Latin America. All participants will be expected to take part in the proceedings (in English/or Spanish), either presenting or 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 (CROPs 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 JULY 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 August 15th 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 December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1998).*

All enquiries about the workshop should be addressed to:

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

**Tel: +47 55 58 97 39**

**Fax: +47 55 58 97 45**

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*The objective of the CROP programme is to establish an arena for interdisciplinary and comparative research on poverty in developed and developing countries. CROP has initiated a series of seminars, workshops and conferences promoting new approaches to strategic issues in poverty research.*

## WORLD REPORTS

A number of international organisations have published their annual reports recently.

UNICEF's **The State of the World's Children 1998** is focusing on nutrition. Malnutrition plays a role in more than half of the nearly 12 million deaths each year of children under five in developing countries. The State of the World's Children 1998 details the scale of the loss and the steps being taken to stem it. More information can be obtained from UNICEF House, 3 United Nations Plaza, New York, New York 10017, USA. The whole report is also available on the Internet at:

<http://www.unicef.org/sowc98/>

The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees has published **The State of the World's Refugees**. It reports that "although the number of people forced to abandon their homes across the world will continue to rise, fewer will be able to find safe refuge." For more information contact the UNHCR, C.P. 2500, 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland. A synopsis of the report is available on the Internet at:

<http://www.unhcr.org/unhcredr/sowr97/menu.htm>

The **State of the World 1998** from the Worldwatch Institute, calls for a restructuring of the global economy. Take a look at: <http://www.worldwatch.org/pubs/sow/sow98/index.html>, or contact Worldwatch Institute, 1776 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036-1904, USA

The **Human Rights Watch World Report 1998** is available from Human Rights Watch, 350 Fifth Avenue, 34th Floor New York, NY, 1118-3299 USA. The report is a review of human rights practices in 65 countries. More information about the report can be found on the Internet at: <http://www.hrw.org/research/worldreport.html>

## NEW BOOK IN POVERTY RESEARCH

Empirical Poverty Research in a Comparative Perspective, is edited by Hans-Jürgen Andreß, and was published by Ashgate earlier this year. The book includes articles from different European countries, based on empirical micro-data. The focus lies on comparative studies contrasting different countries and welfare regimes, looking at changes in time, using different poverty indicators, and comparing groups and individuals with different economic and social characteristics. Priced at £ 49.95. It can be ordered from: Ashgate Gower Customer Service, Bookpoint Limited, 39 Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4TD United Kingdom.

## LIST OF CROP EVENTS 1998 - 1999

### February98:

27-28: "Poverty Alleviation as a Strategy for Social Development in the Mediterranean Area", CROP/INSEA Workshop in Rabat, Morocco.

### 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", Mexico City, Mexico

## WORKSHOPS UNDER PREPARATION

### May99:

"Law and Poverty III: Law as a Tool for Combating Poverty"

### October99:

"The Role of the State in Poverty Alleviation III"

## MICROCREDIT

More than 2900 people from 137 countries gathered at the Microcredit Summit in 1997, to launch a decade-long campaign to reach 100 million of the world's poorest families, especially the women of those families, with credit for self-employment and other financial and business services by the year 2005.

The Summit Campaign Executive Committee has announced the First Annual Meeting of Councils, June 25-27, 1998 in New York City. More information can be obtained at

<http://www.microcreditsummit.org/> or by mail to the Microcredit Summit, 236 Massachusetts Av. NE, # 300, Washington, D.C. 20002, USA, fax: +1 202 546 3228

## 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 QUOTE

*"Poverty itself is a violation of numerous basic human rights."*

Dr. Mary Robinson  
UN High Commissioner for Human Rights