

CROP newsletter

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LOCATING HUMAN DIGNITY AT THE CENTER OF THE POVERTY DEBATE

Ever since Harry Truman officially launched the "development project" in his inaugural speech, poverty eradication has been a global fixation (Escobar, 1995). Millions of pages have been written and an equal amount of dollars spent attempting measure it, decipher its sources and implement strategies to alleviate or eliminate this global malaise. It can be argued that these efforts have had limited impact on the stated goals as poverty continues to increase in many areas. Latin America experienced an increase of 65% of people living in poverty between 1979 and 2001 and currently poor people represents 43% of the region's total population (UNDP and CEPAL cited in Urioste, 2004). Furthermore, according to Bond (2003) the attempts to address poverty in the third world very often has had a counterproductive effect, as many aid programs result in a net transfer to wealthier countries. In general, these strategies of poverty reduction aim to address this global situation by transferring resources and/or knowledge expecting that material conditions will improve. But do these policies ask to what extent poverty eradication programs humiliate or dehumanize its "beneficiaries"? Such questions highlight the crucial issue of dignity or the conditions (in multiple scales) under which poverty reduction programs are conceived and implemented.

Here I will attempt to make the case that human dignity should be at the center of the poverty debate and research. While not negating the material conditions of poverty that plague the global population,

the centrality of addressing these masks the essence of what I think is the aim of constructing a global society based on principles of social justice and equity. In this sense, human dignity should become a normative concept that guides the multiple ways in which poverty eradication programs are conceived and implemented. It has been argued that "If dignity is taken as a central principle, then people cannot be treated as means: the creation of a society based on dignity can only take place through the development of social practices based on the mutual recognition of that dignity" (Holloway, 2002: 159).

It is useful to draw upon Holloway's previous characterization when talking about human dignity, but by inserting the term "human" an attempt to be more specific and precise is sought. In this sense, by human dignity I am referring to the basic sense of a persons feeling as an useful and productive member of society; that he/she recognizes his/her proper humanity and that of other persons; that he/she is proud and confident in expressing his/her heritage without being excluded or discriminated. I may be refuted for using the term "feeling" in an intellectual and political context in which quantitative hard facts are the driving force for the mobilization of so many resources for poverty reduction. However, the individual/collective sense of how people feel about themselves and the society in which they live, are just as important as material conditions. If someone feels alienated and discriminated from a society efforts to

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“satisfy” their basic needs may have humiliating and dehumanizing effect, which, certainly, are counter productive to the ultimate goal of development.

In Latin America, the demands to organize a development project centered in human dignity have been growing during the last decades. With the rise and increasingly important role of social movements at the Latin American political arena, the debate has slowly shifted from a focus on basic access to, or ownership of, resources to a discourse about the multiple forms of participation and rights within a society. The demands and projection of these movements clearly go beyond improving material conditions and is a barometer of how human dignity is becoming an important discursive/political strategy, even if it is not explicitly manifested. For example, the indigenous movement in Colombia has been shifting their discursive/political strategies from that of access to land to that of territoriality. This entails “respect to the integrity of territorial, cultural and collective rights of indigenous peoples” (Mejia, 2005: 12). In other words, territoriality is a strategy by which indigenous people demand recognition of their human dignity, based on the ways they articulate the concept of territory with cultural and social histories and memories.

What would a poverty debate centered on human dignity imply? It would suggest that the transfer of goods and resources would require a deeper analysis with respect to meanings and implications. By emphasizing human dignity, poverty reduction programs would come under a new type of scrutiny that would go beyond the functionalist analysis of how much resources the poor receive, or about the percentage of people living under the poverty line. It would promote a more honest and open dialogue with the “beneficiaries” with the aim of making visible the multiple and fluid definition of human dignity. Obviously, this would be a contested process that entails an immense challenge as it would require a confrontation with histories of discriminations, exclusions, humiliations and pains.

Placing human dignity at the center of the poverty debate would imply that the material conditions of the poor would be a part of a deeper analysis that would not rest solely on the poor. By emphasizing human dignity it would move the debate beyond the act of “giving” to the poor. In other words, it would not solely be what can “we” give to the poor to make “their” lives better, but what (class, race, gender) privileges are we

willing to forego in an effort to construct a more just and equitable world. In this sense, placing human dignity at the center of the poverty debate would encourage a closer look at the processes that exclude and discriminate against the impoverished.

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POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN THE CONTEXT OF DISCRIMINATION OF ETHNIC-RACIAL GROUPS: THE LATIN AMERICAN CASE

The workshop was organized by CLACSO, CROP and Centro de Investigación de la Facultad de Ciencias Sociales y Económicas de la Universidad del Valle (CIDSE) in Cali, Colombia, 23-25 November, 2005. Academic guidance for the workshop was given by a programme committee consisting of Prof. **Fernando Urrea Giraldo** (CIDSE), Prof. **Luz Adriana Giraldo** (Department of Economics, Universidad del Valle) and Dr. **Alberto Cimadamore** (CLACSO, Argentina).

The workshop is part of the *CLACSO-CROP Programme on Poverty Studies in Latin America and the Caribbean* and sponsored by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD). It follows other workshops previously organised by CLACSO-CROP in order to facilitate a network of poverty researchers in the region. The objective of this particular workshop was to analyse discrimination due to ethnicity or race and the relations to class structures and social mobility, with particular reference to the role of ethnic-racial discrimination in shaping both poverty production and poverty reduction processes.

Dr. **Iván Enrique Ramos Calderón**, Rector of Universidad del Valle – who underlined the crucial importance of the theme for both Colombia and Latin America at large – inaugurated the workshop. Prof. **Jaime Escobar** (CIDSE), Dr. **Alberto Cimadamore**, and Prof. **Georges Midré** (CROP), welcomed the participants on behalf of the organizers, pointing to the international and collegial potential for rich academic exchange in the workshop.

Scholars from Latin America as well as some from Europe presented papers in the following panels:

- National Policies and Processes of Exclusion/Inclusion*
- Ethnic-Racial Discrimination in the Labour Market and Labour-Related Social Mobility*
- Racism, Discrimination and Identities*
- Indigenous Peoples: Poverty, Exclusion and Social Mobility*

Visit the CROP website to see the full list of papers presented.

The workshop concluded with an roundtable open to the public, *Análisis de la pobreza y las políticas para su reducción en Colombia*, at Universidad del Valle. Prof. **Fernando Urrea Giraldo** acted as moderator.

BOOKS IN CLACSO-CROP SERIES AVAILABLE ONLINE

The CLACSO-CROP Series (Colección CLACSO-CROP) disseminates research supported by the joint work of the two organizations through their fellowship programme, research results presented at international conferences and workshops and other special projects of the *CLACSO-CROP Programme on Poverty Studies in Latin America and the Caribbean*.

The books published in the series, *The Poverty of the State: Reconsidering the Role of the State in the Struggle against Poverty* and *Trabajo y Producción de la Pobreza en Latinoamérica y el Caribe: Estructuras, Discursos y Actores*, are available online. Visit the CROP webpage for more information: <http://www.crop.org/publications>

editorial

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LAW AND POVERTY: TOWARD AN EMERGING INTERNATIONAL POVERTY LAW

Legal rules significantly affect the distribution of income, assets, and power. While often perceived as natural (both in the sense of arising without human intervention and reflecting a natural order), legal rules, including the background rules of property, family, contract, and tort law are chosen -- frequently to benefit the interests of parties and/or nations in power. Thus whether one is considering current economic structures within nation-states, those earlier imposed by colonizers on colonized states, or those dominating the increasingly globalized economy, legal rules are deeply implicated in maintaining and strengthening status quo power and wealth inequalities, resulting in substantial poverty worldwide.

Through its Law and Poverty programme, CROP seeks to understand and expose the legal structures that perpetuate poverty and to develop new models for reducing poverty, locally and globally. The latest CROP book, *Law and Poverty: Toward an Emerging International Poverty Law* is based on papers presented at the fourth CROP workshop on Law and Poverty. The collection is intended as a contribution to the emerging discourse of International Poverty Law (IPL), which is committed to global poverty reduction and to trans-national, multi-disciplinary legal research dedicated to that goal.

Individually and in dialogue, the chapter-authors seek to advance the theoretical range and sophistication of IPL, working within and approaching issues of poverty from numerous, distinct geographical, disciplinary, and methodological contexts and perspectives. Many of the authors, although by no means all, rely heavily on human rights discourse and UN, ILO, and WTO initiatives as their primary legal sources. Their insights, in turn, problematize the human rights discourse.

The first two chapters provide a framework within which to position the theoretical development of IPL. Building on that theoretical framework, the next five chapters explore specific international human rights initiatives that address a particular aspect of poverty. These include measures required to counter the tendency of intellectual property law as applied to biological products and processes to undermine food security; the right to food as framed in UN development documents; the potential role that transnational corporations'

CALL FOR PAPERS

CROP is organizing a panel on

The Politics of Poverty Production, also a matter of Human Rights and Ethics

at the Norwegian Association for Development Research (NFU) conference 2006:

Ethics, Human Rights and Development

Oslo, Norway, 13-15 September 2006

The aim of the session is to open up for new directions in poverty research through increased understanding of the concept of poverty production and the functioning of poverty producing processes.*

Papers are invited to:

- explore the concept of poverty production and its relationship to other concepts in poverty research,
- bring forward new understanding of actors involved in poverty production and structures under which poverty production is given public space – for example through empirical cases,
- provide new understanding of the dualities built into poverty production.

For those who define poverty as a violation of basic human rights an analysis within a human rights perspective is relevant. For those who work with an ethical research perspective studies of actors involved in structures and repeated events that directly or indirectly produce poverty, are of relevance.

All participants will be expected to take part in the proceedings by presenting and discussing papers. Participants bear the responsibility for their own funding. However, two travel grants are available. The grants will be awarded according to relevance, quality and originality of the abstract/paper. Details on how to apply for travel grants will be forwarded to those authors whose abstracts are accepted for the session.

THE DEADLINE FOR SUBMITTING ABSTRACTS IS APRIL 30

The abstract should include: The title of the proposed paper and a summary of the main theme or argument. The summary should indicate theory, methods and findings and should not exceed ONE PAGE (A4). IMPORTANT: A brief CV along with a list of your most recent publications should accompany the abstract. Please state clearly your name, title, nationality, full postal and e-mail address, telephone and fax numbers. The abstract and CV should be sent (preferably by E-mail) to:

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Participants will be notified by May 31 concerning their paper proposals, and those whose papers are accepted for the panel will be given details of the format in which the papers should be prepared (the deadline for submission of papers is August 15).

The NFU conference 2006 is organized by the Centre for Development and the Environment (SUM), University of Oslo, in collaboration with the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights (NCHR) and the Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI). For more information about the conference visit: http://www.nfuf.no/conf06/conf_06_intro.php

Notes:

*) Else Øyen (2002) "Poverty Production: A Different Approach to Poverty Understanding", in Nikolai Genov (ed.), *Advances in Sociological Knowledge over Half a Century*, Paris: International Social Science Council (ISSC), pp. 351-371.

The article is available on the CROP webpage: <http://www.crop.org/publications>

voluntary codes of conduct might play in poverty reduction; the role of social clauses in trade agreements to address child labour in India; and the evolving vision of constitutional social and economic rights in South Africa. The final chapter provides an overview of human

rights conventions and their connection to poverty reduction. Throughout, the authors seek to re-envision legal discourse and practices in the hope that transformative lawyering can become an even more effective tool for redressing poverty.

CROP LAW AND POVERTY PUBLICATIONS

Since 1995 a group of researchers from the legal and social sciences within the CROP network of poverty researchers have been meeting to study poverty issues of joint interest to the disciplines.

The first publication produced by this cooperative effort, *Law, Power and Poverty*, edited by John Veit-Wilson and Asbjørn Kjønsstad, is now available online on the CROP webpage.

A new book on this subject matter *International Poverty Law: An emerging discourse* will shortly be published by Zed Books in the *CROP International Studies in Poverty Research* series. See Prof. Lucy Williams editorial on page 3 for more information.

NEW POVERTY RESEARCH PROJECTS IN CROPNET

Members of the 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:

- Impact of Worker Remittances on Poverty Reduction in Africa: Selected case studies
- Comparative Study of Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) and National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) in Nigeria. Case Study of Selected Local Governments in Kaduna State 2000-2003

Latin and Central America:

- Petroleum Related FDI, Local Conditions and Poverty Reduction in Brazil

Europe:

- Poverty Reduction Strategies for Prisoners in Turkey

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

NEW BOOKS IN POVERTY RESEARCH

Members of CROP's Scientific Committee and network of poverty researchers have been involved in producing the following books:

Universalizing Elementary Education in India - Uncaging the "Tiger" Economy, by Santosh Mehrotra, PR Panchamukhi, Ranjana Srivastava and Ravi Srivastava, published by Oxford University Press.

The book points to an important agenda for education reform in India, analyzing

LIST OF CROP EVENTS 2006

February

13-17: Educational workshop on methodological approaches to poverty research, for young researchers in the social sciences in the countries of Central America. Organized by CLACSO and CROP in cooperation with FLACSO, Costa Rica.

February

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.

September

13-15: *The Politics of Poverty Production, also a matter of Human Rights and Ethics*, panel organized by CROP at the Norwegian Association for Development Research (NFU) conference 2006: "Ethics, Human Rights and Development", Oslo, Norway. See page 3 for details.

public spending, the comparative effectiveness of private and government schools, and the costs of achieving universal elementary education by 2010.

For ordering information contact Oxford University Press: <http://www.oup.com>

How to make Poverty History: The central role of local organizations in meeting the MDGs, edited by Tom Bigg and David Satterthwaite, published by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED).

The book was produced for UN's 2005 World Summit and it is argued that in relation to the MDG's countries must set their own strategies and policies, together with their global partners, to ensure that poor people receive their fair share of the benefits of development.

For ordering information contact IIED: <http://www.meetingthe mdgs.org>

Poverty and Social Exclusion in Britain: The Millennium Survey, edited by Christina Pantazis, David Gordon and Ruth Levitas, published by The Policy Press.

The book reports on one of the most comprehensive surveys of poverty and social exclusion ever to be undertaken in Britain. The data set gathered records levels of poverty not just in terms of income and wealth but by including information about the goods and services which the British public mean are necessary to avoid poverty.

For ordering information contact The Policy Press: <https://www.policypress.org.uk>

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

IDEA INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

The 7th International Conference on Ethics and International Development, *Accountability, Responsibility, and Integrity in Development: The Ethical Challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa and Beyond*, will be held at Makerere University, Uganda, July 19-22, 2006.

The countries of the world have on paper committed themselves to reducing poverty and to realizing human rights, including a right to development. The premise of this conference is that these commitments can be realized only if accountability, responsibility, and integrity prevail.

The conference is organized by the International Development Ethics Association (IDEA) with the Ethics & Public Management Programme, Faculty of Arts, Makerere University. For more information visit IDEA's website: <http://www.development-ethics.org/>